

**Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve  
Excellence and Equity in Education  
A Governance Review**

**RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM**

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response.

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

- ☐ Individual  
☒ Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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# QUESTIONNAIRE

## Question 1

What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?

### Comments

The responses to the 17 questions in this response have been collated on behalf of the respondents to the survey completed as part of the Midlothian Council consultation on the Education Governance Review.

There are many strengths of the current education system in Scotland. The recent report *Improving Schools in Scotland: an OECD Perspective* recognised core strengths of education delivery; schools are inclusive, students are resilient and attainment levels are increasing. It also highlighted the positive progress which has been made on a system-wide basis to lessens bureaucracy and support learning and teaching.

In our recent survey staff, parents and community groups cited the following key strengths:

- The local authority is already locally responsive with Councils having devolved budget and responsibility, involving parent councils and linking with communities.
- The Local Authority and CPP have overview and provide consistency, fairness and equality.
- Parent Councils involvement in school audits and participating in appointments by being part of the interview panels is welcome and overall parents reporting that they are involved in helping their child to learn
- Managing transition from Primary to Secondary in Midlothian is to be commended.
- DSM allows Head Teachers some flexibility to meet the school's needs.
- Teachers can be wonderful, dedicated and inspiring but school performance depends on high quality leadership .

Head Teachers felt that the following were key strengths of the current governance arrangements:

- Parent/Carer voice is heard, valued and expectation is that schools build meaningful relationships with families and support family learning
- Authorities are accountable as opposed to on a school by school basis
- Provision of early education is a key strength
- Safeguarding procedures
- Principles of GIRFEC
- Self improvement is guided by HGIOS and National Improvement Framework
- Scottish curriculum is skills based and is linked to life and the world of work
- Professional standards help to measure teacher performance
- Staff within Education Scotland use international research to guide policy and practice
- The role that national agencies play and their contribution to the support the development and delivery of education. In particular, the requirement for all teachers in Scotland to be registered with the GTCs, meeting national agreed standards. Participating in professional update maintains a higher standard of professionalism in teaching.
- Overall it was felt that the current system allows for a good understanding of local issues and in some cases the opportunity to change policy and direction relatively quickly.
- The strength of Scotland as a small country is the efficacy of national negotiating arrangements e.g. SNCT which we would want to maintain as well as a more equitable funding formula for all schools across Scotland. Current arrangements for local authorities to fulfil a range of legal responsibilities should be maintained to ensure efficiency.

## Question 2

What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?

### Comments

Midlothian council recognises that there are significant barriers to addressing the issue of poverty and equity. We are wholly committed to this national endeavour but recognise that schools cannot tackle this on their own. We agree that a whole system approach is essential. The Christie principles of prevention and early intervention mean that synergy between all components of learning from pre-school all the way through a child/ young person's journey is crucial. This will require all services, including the health service, to work together for a more equal society in order to deliver excellence and equity for all young people.

However there are a number of barriers within the current governance arrangements which include:

- The national issue of a lack of suitably qualified teachers, particularly supply teachers
- The difficult financial environment in which councils and schools deliver education cannot be ignored and although cuts have led to restructuring of these services, the support at a local authority level continues to be welcomed particularly in supporting the most vulnerable. Collective savings could not be achieved at a school level to the current extent and there is a risk that dilution in the role of local authorities in providing these functions could also lead to a system which lacks equity. Devolving decision-making further may mean that school management teams see things differently resulting in a lack of cohesion and Midlothian Council would welcome more clarity on what is actually being proposed in the Governance Review.
- We agree that there is a need to engage parents and carers from lower income groups, e.g. through parent councils, but that would not be compatible with increasing governance responsibilities of the councils. Parents welcome being involved in their child's learning but do not necessarily wish to take on further responsibilities for school budgets, etc and increased accountability.
- Midlothian welcomes the opportunity for schools to know families well before children start nursery which will help tackle the poverty-attainment issues in the year group 0-3.
- Some systems are overly bureaucratic and Midlothian is committed to tackling bureaucracy
- Agencies are sometimes working in isolation and we would welcome a more joined-up approach in particular with health and the police.

### Question 3

Should the above key principles underpin our approach to reform? Are there other principles which should be applied?

#### Comments

Midlothian Council is in general agreement with the key principles cited in the Governance Review:

- Focused on improving outcomes, and support the delivery of excellence and equity for children and young people
- Meet the needs of all of our children and young people, no matter where they live or their family circumstances
- Support and empower children and young people, parents, teachers, practitioners and communities
- Be supported by a simple and transparent funding system to ensure the maximum public benefit and best value for money
- Support children and young people to make smooth transitions into formal learning, through school and into further education, training or employment

However, we remain unclear on what the educational benefit this governance review seeks to achieve. The Council recognises the importance of the early years and research tells us that educational inequalities start before formal education and therefore targeting support to close the poverty gap in 0-4yrs is of critical importance.

On the whole School leaders in Midlothian welcome the collaborative approach but caution against the use and publication of national test results. There was also concern raised that decisions taken at school level could lead to large variation in approaches and therefore further clarification on what the proposed 'simple and transparent funding system' would look like in practice in order to meet the needs of all our children and young people, no matter where they live or their family circumstances. Consistent access to Health Visitors, outside agencies and Additional Support Needs specialists are an important part of the funding formula together with positive inclusion of parents/carers. Therefore any proposed changes need to have clearly identified the needs particularly for our most disadvantaged communities in order to reduce health inequalities, improve income and aspirations and this work should remain the responsibility of local council and their local communities.

### Question 4

What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children's learning and school life being taken at school level?

#### Comments

Schools welcome the idea of a proposed 'simple and transparent funding system' but more clarity is sought on what this would look like to ensure that budget could be utilised to implement new developments which are designed to improve outcomes and meet the needs of all pupils. However, it is also recognised that any further devolution of financial responsibility would also require training.

Schools welcome the tackling bureaucracy agenda and the reduction in levels of reporting is welcome however we caution against the publication of test results using 'experimental data'. The strength of Scotland as a small country is the efficacy of national negotiating arrangements e.g. SNCT which we would want to maintain as well as a more equitable funding formula for all schools across Scotland. Current arrangements for local authorities to fulfil a range of legal responsibilities should be maintained to ensure efficiency.

The national DSM statutory guidelines should be fully implemented at school level to enable local decision making about how best to achieve excellence and equity.

## Question 5

What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to teachers and headteachers to enable this? You may wish to provide examples of decisions currently taken by teachers or headteachers and decisions which cannot currently be made at school level.

### Comments

The best interest of children and young people should be the primary consideration with an emphasis on providing the highest quality of learning and teaching. Head Teachers believe that the core business of delivering Learning and Teaching should remain with schools. If additional administrative functions were devolved to schools then schools would require additional resources to manage this e.g. a business manager.

Linked to transparent and fair funding, schools would welcome more detail on this as this may provide a solution to enhancing the current arrangements for staffing (including; school structures, promoted posts and administrative support) and the job-sizing toolkit which is currently under review. However, it is recognised that within the governance review there is a risk that a culture of competing demands result in schools having increased responsibility for managing complex staffing and budget issues. There is also concern that more decision-making at school level may lead to less equity rather than a more equitable system.

Schools would welcome the ability to increase access to play therapists and more health visitors in order to meet the local needs of pupils but would welcome further assurance that the proposed 'simple and transparent funding system' will result in an increase in funding but this is not clearly stated in the Governance Review documentation.

## Question 6

How can children, parents, communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life? What actions should be taken to support this?

### Comments

Midlothian highly values the strong partnership working which is currently in place and should remain largely unchanged. There are existing frameworks for parental involvement which provide opportunity for schools to engage with parents and we recognise the importance of finding new ways to work as there is always scope to look at new ways to increase the involvement of the other partners listed to play a stronger role in school life and local communities. **t. For example extending the**

Involving pupil councils in decision making is also welcome and this already happens in our schools. Parent Councils have good links but there was concern that people do not have the capacity to play a stronger role. Strengthening the governance role of parent councils could help improve community engagement provided does not alienate by taking too much time as that would not be compatible with increasing governance responsibilities of the councils. Parents welcome being involved in their child's learning but do not necessarily wish to take on further responsibilities for school budgets, etc and increased accountability.

Our strong links with our faith communities and the positive impact of this work is a key strength in Midlothian.

In Midlothian, communities are already fully involved and youth forums flourish, employers provide work experience and apprenticeships and there are good links with further education, although this could be improved by sharing best practice.

### Question 7

How can the governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

#### Comments

We believe that the existing local authority provision, if appropriately funded, is best placed to deliver Early Learning and Childcare. Midlothian feel that schools should be at the heart of local communities, we have very strong links with our communities and we believe that we deliver the best results when we all work together to support learning with the best solution being delivered at the most local level. We agree that the emphasis on early education is essential in our national endeavour to close the poverty-related attainment gap but also recognise that any provision for early learning and childcare should be of a high quality and although we welcome the commitment to 1140hrs, we also recognise the workforce and property challenge that this brings and therefore early confirmation of funding streams would be welcome. The close geographical proximity provided by local governance, including the vital role of local Councillors is particularly important in the co-ordination and support of early years provision.

### Question 8

How can effective collaboration amongst teachers and practitioners be further encouraged and incentivised?

#### Comments

Working collaboratively produces positive outcomes towards improving the lives of children, young people and families. The principle of the self improving partnerships and collaboration between schools has proved to be successful and schools welcome the opportunity to look outwards and to share best practice with other professionals, across learning communities and with other practitioners out with education. However, the time and opportunity for this to be truly effective is limited and additional time allocated for opportunities to collaborate with partners would be welcome but in order to achieve this a solution to the supply issue would be essential. More flexible in-service dates would also be useful which could allow schools to choose timings of sessions and support agencies working with smaller groups. The principle of strengthening 3-18 cluster working is supported, however, in practice there is a wide variation of effective experiences. It is also important to note that any future collaborations could be at risk by the focus on publishing school by school attainment data which could then promote a culture of competition rather than one of collaboration.

### Question 9

What services and support functions could be provided more effectively through clusters of schools working together with partners?

#### Comments

The meaning of what constitutes a 'cluster' is not defined clearly within the Governance Review documentation. Schools already work within their natural groupings and the idea of clusters of schools is not new nor is the idea of working effectively with partners. Protected time for sharing ideas and practices with other establishments would be welcome as this could help to further improve key transition points. Clusters could share training opportunities, data gathering, monitoring and quality improvement approaches.

Midlothian Council believe that strong support systems are based locally. In Midlothian clusters of schools already have access to devolved ASN budgets. The complexity of GIRFEC and ASN demands require significant expert inputs from 3-18. We strongly believe that a range of services should be available at local level to ensure that the needs of the young people are met efficiently as well as effectively.

## Question 10

What services or functions are best delivered at a regional level? This may include functions or services currently delivered at a local or a national level.

### Comments

What constitutes 'at a regional level' is not clearly defined in the Governance Review documentation. Local authorities currently engage in collaboration and across the country there is cross-border and cross-interest collaboration. Moving forward, our local authority would keenly engage in further collaboration but within a framework which supports improved outcomes for children and young people and therefore we do not subscribe to the approach that regions should be set entities but rather a common sense approach with a shared purpose. We would welcome the grouping of a number of local authorities into a regional approach if this could deliver improved approaches in terms of administrative functions e.g. Human Resource management and Finance and there could be important merit in sharing quality improvement, subject specific advisors and in the commissioning of ASN and specialist services at the regional level. We do not support the idea of an additional accountability layer if the regional level means the creation of regional boards. However, we would warmly welcome regional approaches which focus on collaborative approaches to raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap as this would allow for the development of specialist expertise from a larger pool which could be available if we are to work much more closely together.

The survey cited some examples of what could be delivered at the regional level:

- Co-operative links between services such as Health and the Police
- Opportunities for sharing best practice, quality improvement and subject specific support
- Whole area services e.g. Speech and language – contract in as a regional bit but then tier down to local posts who are aware and responsive to community needs
- Collaborative training e.g. conferences which can command nationally important speakers
- Staffing overview for deployment across wider area especially for supply
- Sharing of translation services and other specialist services

## Question 11

What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?

### Comments

What constitutes 'at a regional level' is not clearly defined in the Governance Review documentation. As well as no clear definition, there is no clear Educational benefit to establishing educational regions within the content of the Governance review and therefore more clarity and detail is required. There is the potential risk that decision making will be even further from schools and communities. Identities of established villages, towns and communities are often strong and should be the starting point for community engagement rather than the regional level and concern was raised in terms of equity and also competing local governance arrangements which are currently in place. Therefore, it would be important that a regional organisation had a clear understanding of local needs. We support the principle of sharing services where this would lead to improved outcomes for learners and would welcome collaborative approaches to sharing practice and clearly the need to operate in a geographic area of reasonable size to enable collaborative working is paramount although we recognise that rural Scotland will face bigger challenges.

## Question 12

What services or support functions should be delivered at a national level?

### Comments

Overall, what currently is delivered at the national level should remain. However there may be merit in considering what a National staffing formula could look like and the possibility of establishing a national payroll for teachers. It would be important to stress that any national staffing formula should also take into consideration the circumstances and challenges that face individual schools.

## Question 13

How should governance support teacher education and professional learning in order to build the professional capacity we need?

### Comments

Currently one of the main challenges facing education is the ability to recruit and retain suitably qualified supply teachers, teachers and school leaders. Any changes made to the governance of Scottish Education should ensure that school leaders are provided with the greatest opportunity to make the biggest difference to the children and young people and to value an important workforce therefore we would welcome further investment in workforce planning. This is an area which we would welcome further dialogue as a much improved workforce planning strategy needs to be developed with urgency because of the current shortage of staff across Scotland. We support the provision of increased teacher training places to be made available for the number of applicants who wish to choose a career in teaching in order to meet the current demand which exists within the system as shown by the number of current vacancies across Scotland.

Continuing Professional Learning is currently delivered in a variety of ways by a variety of providers and the shift towards a greater expectation of teachers to enhance their professionalism through professional update and GTC standards are welcomed. It is vital that due consideration is given to teacher workload and current contractual arrangements when organising opportunities for professional collaboration and learning.

## Question 14

Should the funding formula for schools be guided by the principles that it should support excellence and equity, be fair, simple, transparent, predictable and deliver value for money? Should other principles be used to inform the design of the formula?

### Comments

Supporting excellence and equity are key and we support the aspiration to create a funding formula which supports excellence and equity, is fair, simple, transparent, predictable and delivers value for money but there is a lack of detail in the Governance review. Therefore we would welcome further detail about the proposed models which are being considered. It is also essential that any proposed funding formula takes into account variations in needs, levels of deprivation, collaborative working, size and other criteria to ensure equity for all young people is essential.



### Question 15

What further controls over funding should be devolved to school level?

#### Comments

- The Christie principles of prevention and early intervention mean that synergy between all components of learning from pre-school all the way through a child/ young person's journey is crucial. This will require all services, including the health service, to work together for a more equal society in order to deliver excellence and equity for all young people. We do not propose an increase in controls over funding but simply a formula which delivers the right resource at the right time for all of our children and young people. The difficult financial environment in which councils and schools deliver education cannot be ignored and although cuts have led to restructuring of these services, the support at a local authority level continues to be welcomed particularly in supporting the most vulnerable.

### Question 16

How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?

#### Comments

There are inherent tensions in the Governance Review paper between the 'clear objective to devolve decision making and funding to teachers, schools, parents' and ensuring that teachers and schools have the 'flexibility and freedom to teach'. The current model for accountability is appropriate and proportionate and therefore we do not support increased accountability or bureaucracy at school level. Head teachers and teachers are already empowered in driving school improvement to suit the needs of their schools, however this is a huge challenge when there is a lack of supply and suitably qualified teachers.

### Question 17

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the governance of education in Scotland?

#### Comments

In Midlothian we are committed to providing the highest quality of learning and positive outcomes for our learners and we welcome the opportunity to review the current systems in place with a view to improve these. Currently one of the main challenges facing education is the ability to recruit suitably qualified supply teachers, teachers and school leaders. Any changes made to the governance of Scottish Education should ensure that school leaders are provided with the greatest opportunity to make the biggest difference to the children and young people and therefore we would welcome further investment in workforce planning.